**Living a life with Anorexia**

Nicole Derdak and Anthony Marrese

At age 13, after years of constant verbal and physical abuse from her parents, Mary turned to anorexia as a way to gain attention from her parents. She lost 25 pounds in a month by starving herself and constantly over-exercising. When Mary was 15, her parents forced her into a recovery facility where she gained some weight but she did not deal with the issues causing her anorexia. She exited recovery after gaining 10 pounds but for the next few years she would just “manage” her anorexia by not losing too much weight as to force her into recovery once again. Anorexia has controlled Mary’s life for many years, and Mary still struggles with this disorder today. Mary is now in graduate school where she is on her way to gaining a degree but she still deals with anorexia and her fear of eating every day. This story is not one of a kind. There are many people who struggle with Anorexia on a day to day basis.

Anorexia Nervosa, or simply anorexia, is an eating disorder which affects about 1 out of every 100 adolescent girls in the U.S. Anorexia is when a person feels they are overweight and they begin to diet excessively, to the point where dieting becomes out of control. Many times emotional issues in one’s life make someone turn to anorexia as a way of feeling a sense of control. By not eating and starving the body a person can feel empowered and feel like they have control of their emotions and the way their body looks. Anorexia is also seen is young women who feel they need to lose weight or be “skinny” in order to fit in or look good. This disorder causes individuals who are at normal weight or even underweight to believe they are too overweight, and many feel that they must lose even more weight. Another characteristic sometimes seen in those with anorexia is the process of binging and purging. Binging and purging is the process of eating a large amount of food and then either vomiting or using laxatives in order to rid their bodies of the food they just consumed.

Anorexia is a very dangerous disorder and has many health risks associated with it such as: malnutrition, where the body does not have enough nutrients to perform simple bodily functions, dehydration, which is a fluid shortage in the body that can lead to heart attack or seizures, and even death at later stages if the disease is not treated. Some other symptoms that are normally associated with anorexia are excessive exercise, and the intake of mass amounts of laxatives to make the body dispose of food much faster than its normal rate.

Imagine waking up everyday thinking you are never thin enough; you never want to eat because the thought of gaining weight terrifies you, and you want to exercise excessively to burn off everything you ate that day. These are only some of the symptoms that the average anorexia victim has to deal with everyday. Of course one of the first signs and symptoms is dramatic weight loss. The preoccupation and fear of gaining weight is all that runs through an anorexics mind. The most terrifying aspect of the disorder is that someone suffering from the disorder will look in the mirror and see themselves as being fat or overweight; meanwhile they are truly as thin as a twig but cannot get away from the thought that they are overweight. The symptoms that go along with these fears are devastating.

There are plenty of symptoms and results from having anorexia which are both mental and physical. Many think that the only physical sign of anorexia is being extremely thin but there are many other signs as well. An anorexic will become so malnourished that their hair and nails will become brittle and their skin will become dry and have a yellowish tint. Many times anorexics will even feel very cold on the warmest days because their body temperature will drop so low because they do not contain enough body fat. In some cases because of the constant feeling of coldness they will even grow fine hair all over there body to try to keep warm also known as lanugo. Anorexics usually have a body mass index of less than 17.5. Because of the low BMI they have a higher chance of a stunted growth, [endocrine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endocrine) disorder, leading to cessation of periods in girls also known as [amenorrhea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amenorrhoea). In males a decreased libido and impotence can occur. Other symptoms for both males and females include a reduced [metabolism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metabolism), slow heart rate also known as [bradycardia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bradycardia), [hypotension](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypotension), [hypothermia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypothermia) and [anemia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anemia). Abnormalities of mineral and [electrolyte](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electrolyte) levels can occur in the body leading to the thinning of the hair, [zinc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zinc) deficiency, reduction in [white blood cell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_blood_cell) count, reduced [immune system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immune_system) function, pallid [complexion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complexion) and sunken eyes. Anorexia can cause dehydration which can cause creaking joints and bones, collection of fluid in ankles during the day and around eyes during the night, [tooth decay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tooth_decay), [constipation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constipation), dry or chapped lips, and poor circulation, resulting in common attacks of pins and needles and purple extremities. In cases of extreme [weight loss](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weight_loss), there can be nerve deterioration, leading to difficulty in moving of the feet, [headaches](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Headaches), [bruising](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruising) easily, fragile appearance, slowing of the rate of growth of breasts, drastic changes in blood pressure upon standing, and dizziness and fainting are all common physical signs of anorexia.

Besides the physical signs of anorexia there are several mental effects and symptoms. People with anorexia develop odd eating habits such as cutting their food into tiny pieces, refusing to eat in front of others, or fixing elaborate meals for others that they themselves do not eat. Food and weight become obsessions as people with this disorder constantly think about their next encounter with food. Anorexics make excuses just to avoid eating, such as they have a stomach ache or they just ate and are very full. Other mental side effects are depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse disorders, along with low self esteem and feeling of loneliness. Anorexics tend to be very moody and irritable at times because of lack of food. Studies have shown that a person who doesn’t deprive themselves is more likely to be a happier than a person who does deprive themselves, according to American Academy of Family Physicians.

There are several causes that are said to lead to anorexia. Cultural pressure is one of the leading causes to anorexia. Today, being extremely thin is the definition of beauty. It represents happiness, success, and self-control. Women are bombarded with messages from the media that they must diet if they want to lead a happy successful life. However, the thought of being mega thin is most likely unrealistic for our bodies because of genetics. When a person is born they have a predetermined weight range that they most likely will fall into when they are adults, according to Health Information Publications. This means that your body will eventually refuse to lose any more weight because your metabolism has already been preset to stay at a certain pace and once you have dropped to the lowest weight your body can handle it will not allow you to lose any more. Because anorexics can never get the bodies they see in the media they become unhappy and depressed always wishing for something they can’t have.

Not only will an anorexic want to be thin to try to make themselves happy but there are many occupations that put pressure on them to look a certain way. Occupations such as dancing, modeling, and sports like gymnastics, figure skating, running, and wrestling causes pressure to maintain a specific weight. Another cause of anorexia is emotional and family issues. Many parents that are over protective, strict, and overbearing tend to have a family child suffering from the disease, according to Health Information Publications. In these cases anorexics develop a struggle for independence and individuality. This is likely to occur in adolescence when new demands for independence occur. The last few family causes are parents or siblings that over evaluate your appearance, which will tend to make a person feel belittled and that they are not good enough. One of the last causes is life transitions. A life transition is a time in a person’s life when there is a significant change in their life. Life transitions can sometimes cause anorexia because people tend to become very vulnerable at times like this and can cause you to take it out on yourself. Some examples are beginning of adolescence, break up with a significant other, beginning or failing at school or work, and death of a loved one. And the final cause of anorexia is genetics. Anorexia occurs eight times more often in people who have relatives with the disorder. However, experts do not know exactly what the inherited factor may be. In addition, anorexia occurs more often in families with a history of depression or alcohol abuse.

There is currently no cure to for anorexia but there are several treatments to help suppress the disorder. Treatment for people suffering from anorexia can be extremely hard and may sometimes fail. The first step in treatment is helping the person with the problem realize they have a problem and that they are battling a disease. Therapy is one of the best and most effective treatments for anorexics. Individual therapy allows you to get back on track to a healthy way of thinking and share your feelings about how you feel about your disease. Along with individual therapy family therapy is almost always used to supplement it. Family therapy can be useful to provide information about anorexia, assess the impact of the disorder on the family, help members of the family overcome guilt of maybe criticizing the victim about their appearance, and developing practical strategies for overcoming the disorder. Many medications have been tried to cure anorexia, but medication alone is not effective. Because depression and other emotional problems are often a result of starvation, it is best to focus on weight gain rather than medication. In addition, the effects of starvation decrease the effectiveness of antidepressants and can sometimes worsen the side effects. However, medication may be required to deal with overwhelming anxiety, obsessions, depression, or gastric discomfort following meals. The last form of treatment is hospitalization. Although it is rare in some cases it is a necessity when on a fine line of life and death. The advantage of hospital treatment is that it provides a safe environment where food and weight can be carefully monitored while physical concerns are explored.

A woman named Stacy shares her story of being anorexic since she was 16 years old.

“I suffer from anorexia. I began my eating disorder when I was 16. It started to lose weight, and then just spiraled out of control since then. I was on the chubby side and my family's comments hurt bad, they said them out of concern but that’s not the way I took it. I know just having people call you fat is not the reason you become anorexic. I was sexually molested by my older sister when I was five. My father died when I was six and I never really could accept that. I was a straight-A student and was in sports, I was supposed to be playing softball when I got to college but my anorexia put a stop to that. When I entered my freshman year in college, I was raped. I could not deal with that at all; the only way I could was by controlling my eating. So I restricted because it was the only thing that I felt I could control.”

Stacy’s story is a perfect example of someone who lived through anorexia. She dealt with many different things that aided to her disorder, and the reason she stuck with it for so long is because like she said it was the only thing she felt that she could “control”.

Anorexia is a [psychiatric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychiatry) [illness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illness) that describes an [eating disorder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eating_disorder) characterized by extremely low [body weight](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_weight) and [body image](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_image) distortion with an obsessive fear of gaining weight. Individuals with anorexia are known to control body weight commonly through starvation, [purging](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purging), excessive [exercise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise) or other weight control measures such as [diet pills](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diet_pill). The causes and signs of the disease alone can be enough to make your life unbearable and depressing. There is no cure for anorexia but there are treatments that can help living with the disease easier. My sister Jessica has dealt with anorexia for the past two years. Watching Jessica live her life being obsessed with her appearance and never thinking she’s thin enough or pretty enough has made me understand how devastating the disease truly is.

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